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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [TD](#)
SUBJECT: BAKR ALLEGATION AGAINST PM AGAIN SURFACES

REF: PORT OF SPAIN 0222

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) Summary: A judge has directed that the 2006 allegation by Jamaat al Muslimeen (JAM) leader Yasin Abu Bakr that he cut a deal with Prime Minister Manning on the eve of the 2002 election to provide foot soldiers for the PNM campaign be investigated. Bakr claims that, in exchange, Manning was going to forgive a large JAM legal debt. While some in the opposition are highlighting this claim, Attorney General Jeremie argued it has little veracity and is at variance with testimony Bakr provided in 2005. Manning also denied the allegation, as have other GOTT officials. Given Bakr's low credibility and the endless dead ends of the local legal system, it is unlikely this allegation will lead to anything. End Summary.

A Murky Claim

12. (SBU) The JAM's legal debt of approximately \$5 million stems from fines related to its role in the 1990 coup. The GOTT has been seeking to seize JAM properties for some time to cover the debt. In 2006, as part of the effort to keep his properties, Bakr provided an affidavit where he raised his alleged electoral deal with Manning. Bakr has lost repeatedly in local courts and also before the Privy Council, which ruled his affidavit "irrelevant," and said the JAM's properties could be sold. Local High Court Justice Narine, though, ruled on Sept 11 that Bakr's allegation merits investigation since, if true, they would "strike at the heart of our democratic system of government."

No Authority

13. (SBU) PM Manning denied the allegations, asking if they were true, why has the government spent years trying to seize Bakr's lands? Minister of Works and Transport Colm Imbert, a Manning confidant, also questioned Narine's authority to "order the police to investigate an unproven allegation." Attorney General John Jeremie further noted that Bakr's 2006 claim is belied by testimony he gave in a separate 2005 case. A close aide to the PM also told us that Manning will not formally respond to the accusations because it is the Attorney General's responsibility to do so. The aide added that Bakr's properties will soon be sold.

Comment: Into the Round File

14. (SBU) It is by no means clear that there is anything to Bakr's allegations; his reputation for probity and honesty is not exactly sterling in T&T. Many here are still upset over his role in the 1990 coup and also his supposed current criminal ties. While there is a widespread belief that Manning was assisted by the JAM in 2002, the reason is unclear and there is now no love lost between the two. While the press is trying to keep the story alive -- including through a false allegation that DHS listed this case on its website (we have gone back to the newspaper on this) -- the most likely outcome is for the matter to float away. It will occasionally surface, but absent a smoking gun, not threaten Manning in any way.

KUSNITZ